THE TRAGICAL HISTORY

OF

The Babes in the Wood,

Whose Father, a rich Gentleman in Norfolk, when dying, committed to the Guardianship of his own Brother. — But this cruel and unnatural Wretch, in order to possess himself of their Fortunes, caused the Children to be destroyed soon after their Father's Death. — He is punished for his Perfidy, in the most extraordinary Manner, by Divine Justice, as set forth in the Sequel.

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THE TRAGICAL HISTORY

BRITISH MUSEUM

The BABES in the WOOD.

NOW ponder well, ye parents dear,
These words which I shall write,
A doleful story you shall hear,
In time brought forth to light:
A gentleman of good account,
In Norfolk dwelt of late,
Who did in honour far surmount
Most men of his estate.

Sore sick he was and like to die,
No help his life could save,
His wife by him as sick did lie,
And both possess'd one grave.
No love between this pair was lost,
They were to each other kind;
In love they liv'd, in love they dy'd,
And left two babes behind.

The one a fine and pretty boy,
Not passing three years old;
The other a girl more young than he,
And fram'd in beauty's mold:

The father left his little ſon,
As plainly doth appear,
When he to perfect age ſhould come,
Three hundred pounds a year.

And to his little daughter, Jane,
Five hundred pounds in gold,
To be paid on her marriage-day,
Which might not be controll'd:
But if the children chanc'd to die,
Ere they to age ſhould come,
Their uncle ſhould poſſeſs their wealth,
For ſo the will did run.

Now, brother, ſaid the dying man,
Look to my children dear,
Be good unto my boy and girl,
No friend elſe have they here:
To God and you I do commend
My children night and day;
A little while we only have
Within this world to ſtay.

You muſt be father and mother both,
And uncle all in one;
God knows what will become of them
When I am dead and gone.
With that bespoke the mother dear,
Oh! brother kind, quoth ſhe,
You are the man muſt bring our babes
To wealth or miſery.

And if you keep them carefully,
Then God will you reward;
But if you otherwise should deal,
He will your deeds regard:
With lips as cold as any stone,
They kiss'd their children small,
God bless you both, my children dear,
With that the tears did fall.

These speeches then their brother spake,
To this sick couple there,
The keeping of your children small,
Sweet sister, do not fear;
God never prosper me nor mine,
Nor aught that else I have,
If I do wrong your children dear,
When you're laid in the grave.

Their parents being dead and gone,
The children then he takes,
And brings them straight unto his house,
Where much of them he makes.
He had not kept these pretty babes
A twelvemonth and a day,
But for their wealth he did devise,
To make them both away.

He bargain'd with two ruffians strong,
Which were of furious mood,
That they should take the children young,
And slay them in a wood.

He told his wife, the deed to hide,
He would these children send
To be brought up in fair London,
With one that was his friend.

Away then went these pretty babes,
Rejoicing at the tide,
And laughing with a merry mind,
That they on horse should ride:
They talk'd and prattled pleasantly
As they rode on the way,
To those that would their butchers be,
And take their lives away.

So that the pretty speech they had
Made the murd'rers relent;
That they hir'd the deed to do
Full sore they did repent;
Yet one, more hard of heart,
Did vow to do his charge,
Because the wretch that hired him
Had paid him very large.

The other would not agree thereto,
On which they fell to strife,
With one another they did fight
About the children's life;
And he that was of milder mood,
Did slay the other there,
Within an unfrequented wood,
While babes did quake for fear.

He took the children by the hands,
Tears ſtanding in their eyes,
And bid them come and go with him,
And look they did not cry.
Full two long miles he led them thus,
Till they for bread complain'd,
Stay here, quoth he, I'll bring you ſome
When I come back again.

Thoſe pretty babes, with hand in hand,
Went wand'ring up and down,
But never more they ſaw the man
Approaching from the town;
Their pretty lips with blackberries
Were all beſmear'd and dy'd,
And when they ſaw the darkſome night
They ſat them down and cry'd.

Thus wander'd theſe two pretty babes,
Till death ended their grief;
In one another's arms they dy'd,
Like babes wanting relief:
No burial did thoſe pretty babes
Of any man receive,
Till robin-read-breaſt, painfully,
Did cover them with leaves.

And now the heavy wrath of God
Upon their uncle fell;
Yea, frightful fiends did haunt his houſe,
His conſcience felt a hell;

His barns were fir'd, his goods conſum'd,
His lands were barren made,
His cattle dy'd within the field,
And nothing with him ſtay'd.

And in a voyage to Portugal
Two of his ſons did die;
And to conclude, himſelf was brought
To want and miſery:
He pawn'd and mortgag'd all his land,
Ere ſeven years came 'bout,
And now at length this wicked act
Was by theſe means found out.

The fellow that did take in hand
Theſe children for to kill,
Was for a robbery judg'd to die,
Such was God's bleſſed will;
Who did confeſs the very truth,
The which is here expreſt;
Their uncle dy'd while he for debt
Did long in priſon reſt.

All ye that executors are made,
And ye guardians eke,
Of children that are fatherleſs,
And of infants, mild and meek;
Take now example by his fate,
And yield to them their right,
Leſt God with ſuch-like miſery
Your wicked deeds requite.

FINIS.

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